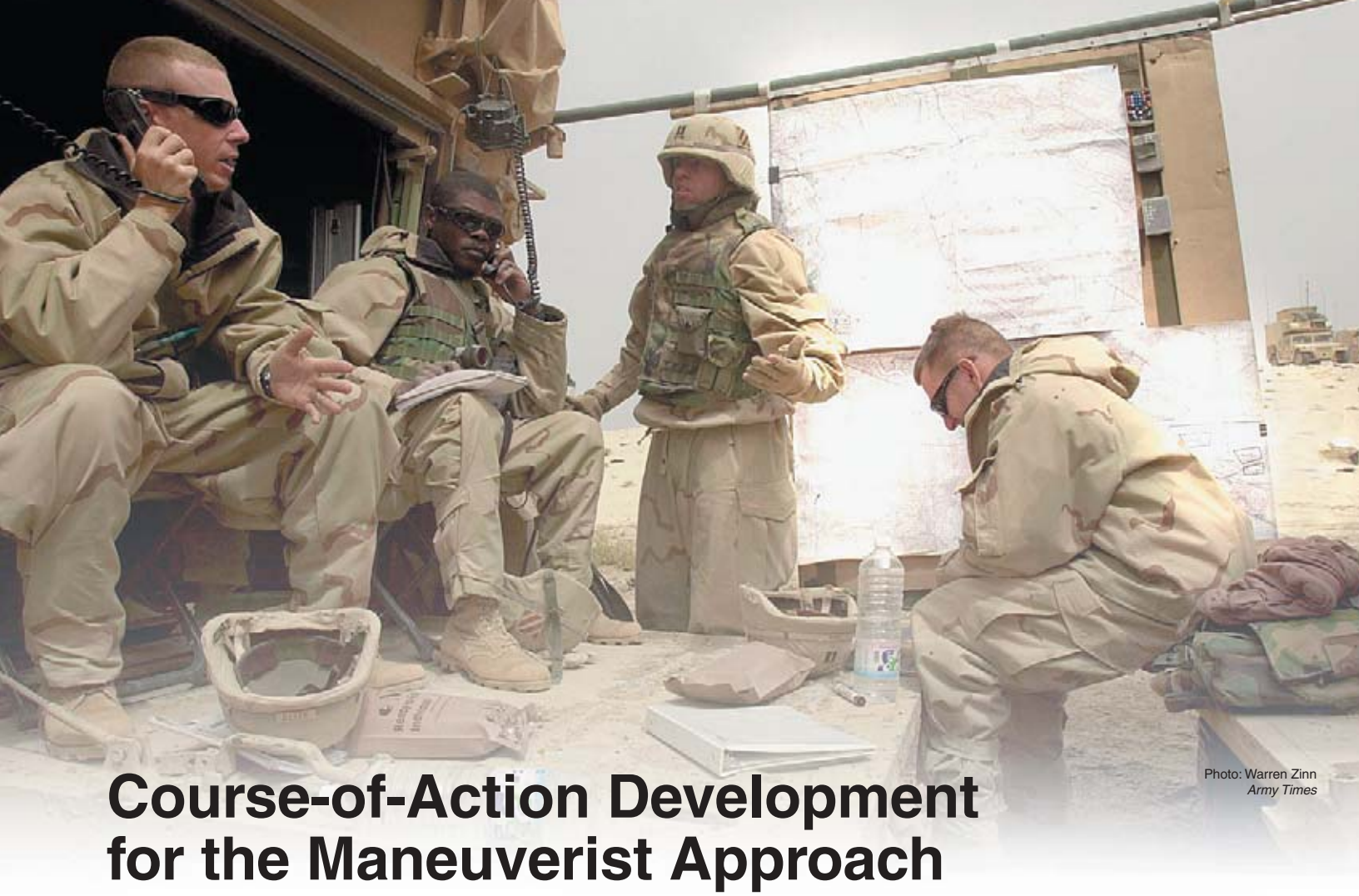

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Army Times

Course-of-Action Development for the Maneuverist Approach

by Lieutenant Colonel Kevin D. Poling

The commander's concept is his supreme contribution to the prospect of victory on the battlefield whether he is at the tactical or operational level. Without a sound and dominating concept of operation, no amount of command presence, personal flair, years of rectitude, demonstrated integrity, advanced degrees, perfectly managed assignments, warrior spirit, personal courage, weapons proficiency or troop morale can hope to compensate. Of all the qualities we seek to imbue in our leaders, the ability to create and apply a powerful pre-emptive concept in the heat and pressures of battle and to propagate that central set of ideas throughout the minds of his subordinates is the heart of command.[1]

— General William E. DePuy

I congratulate all who are participating in current tactical operations in Iraq. My recommendations in this article are based on observations from unit training events over the past several years and are not meant as a bad reflection of our brilliant success at the tactical level in Operation Iraqi Freedom. I hope this article provides a foundation on which to discuss lessons learned from this war.

One of the great benefits of being an observer/controller at the National Training Center (NTC) is the ability to sample and assess the smorgasbord of techniques and procedures used by our battalion-sized units in conducting operations over a 15-day campaign and training rotation. U.S. Army doctrine, although prescriptive, gives commanders a fair amount of latitude in developing various methods to accomplish their assigned task and purpose. Doctrine, as expressed in our respective field manuals and mission training plans, lays the foundation on which battalions develop varying internal techniques and procedures. Modifications are made that reflect not only the commander's personal viewpoints on using varying techniques and procedures to execute doctrinal missions, but also a habitual way of doing things tied to the higher headquarters' method of executing doctrine and missions.

More specifically, battalions arrive at the NTC with various tactical standing operating procedures (TACSOPs) used to plan, prepare for, and execute missions. These measures constitute the very essence of the unit's ability to effectively convey missions to subordinate units. Each battalion comes to the NTC with some rehearsed, if not also written, methodology on how the commander and staff will develop and publish the battalion's operations order (OPORD) using the military decision-making process (MDMP) from U.S. Army Field Manual (FM) 101-5, *Staff Organization and Operations,* as the guide.[2] Some units execute this technical process better than others and for differing reasons: a better train-up program; a better understanding of how to operate in a time-constrained environment; or simply a better preparation than others to execute the MDMP here at the NTC.

This statement is not surprising or earth shattering. But what *is* astonishing is that no matter how effective or ineffective our technical process, battalion OPORDs are generally not well written and, subsequently, the battalion plan is not effectively communicated to subordinates. This observation rings true rotation after rotation. Our battalion-sized units are not meeting the standard in terms of conveying the basic combined-arms

"In many instances, the battalion gives conflicting tasks and purposes to subordinates in the concept of operations, the maneuver subparagraph, and task to subordinate unit's subparagraph. Instead of keeping things simple using task and purpose, and stating that task and purpose only once in the order, many units deem redundancy and the use of a very detailed, wordy concept as the only way to fully communicate "how" the battle will be fought."

plan to subordinate units in an easily understood or readable fashion. Subordinate unit commanders and leaders, therefore, do not truly understand what is expected of them for the upcoming mission.[3] The issue is not a result of various formats we are using, but of the thought process, the art, the tactical problem-solving, and the language that goes into developing a well-conceived OPORD and concept of operations. From the military art perspective, we know full well what we have to do, but in the end, we do not really know how to develop a good tactical plan combined with the means to communicate that plan to subordinates. Without a solid course of action, units can never hope to effectively integrate the available assets of other battlefield operating systems (BOSs) or produce an OPORD that offers subordinates a clear, concise, and simple concept of how the battalion will accomplish its assigned task and purpose.

In general, at the battalion level, we are not good tactical problemsolvers, and we do not communicate our tactical plans well to our subordinates. This article outlines a methodology that will allow battalion-sized units to develop a sound and simple tactical plan using task and *meaningful* purpose, and to communicate that plan effectively to subordinates.[4] It starts with developing a good course of action (COA) and COA statement that, in the end, positively affects the other steps of the MDMP. COA development becomes the solid foundation and focal point of not only the MDMP, but also of the OPORD as expressed in the concept of operations. This mental methodology becomes the military artist's guide to both developing a solid tactical plan and putting that plan into an easily understood and readable narrative for subordinates to execute. This methodology works in both time-constrained and time-abundant environments. It can be used to produce a full OPORD, or to develop and issue a fragmentary order (FRAGO) during the conduct of the fight.[5]

Small-unit fights, engagements, and battles are a contest of wills among opposing commanders, leaders, and soldiers. The critical core of warfighting lies in our mental approach to outmaneuvering and outsmarting our opponent to win.[6] The concept of operations to win the fight is certainly the heart of command, but to what purpose? It is to shatter the opponent's will to fight, and hence the linkage between the mental activity necessary to develop a course of action and the mental goal of the maneuverist's approach to winning — two sides of the same coin. The goal of course-of-action development is to articulate a concept that, when executed, imposes our will over the enemy's to accomplish our assigned task and purpose, or our unique contribution to the higher mission. The maneuverist approach is inseparable from developing a concept of operations in the spirit of General DePuy's words and our own warfighting doctrine.[7]

Maneuverist approach…an approach in which shattering the enemy's overall cohesion and will to fight is paramount. It calls for an attitude of mind in which doing the unexpected, using initiative and seeking originality is combined with a ruthless determination to succeed.[8]

— Design for Military Operations:
The British Military Doctrine, 1996

If we experience problems in our creativity to develop tactical plans and effectively convey them to our subordinates, then we fall short of our goals and thus fall short in mission accomplishment. The second-order effects of this issue are critical: subordinate units spend many valuable hours figuring out *what* they must do for their part of the plan and *why*, rather than focusing on *how to* accomplish their assigned mission. Subordinate unit planning time is squandered and critical preparations contained within the troop-leading procedures (TLPs) and unit SOPs are not executed to standard, if at all. It is not enough for a battalion to have a good-looking OPORD format, a good technical orders production process and SOP, and an effective battalion timeline, if the OPORD language and the solution to the tactical problem offer unclear, conflicting, and ineffective guidance to subordinates. Although these former elements are all necessary for success, the OPORD will fail to convey the commander's mission and concept of operations, enhanced by the commander's intent, if the language, tactical solution, and guidance are conflicting and confusing. Although these issues might be clarified in a subsequent FRAGO or at the battalion rehearsal, many valuable hours of subordinate units' preparation time is needlessly wasted.

What are some of the specifics regarding this issue? In many instances, the battalion gives conflicting tasks and purposes to subordinates in the concept of operations, the maneuver subparagraph, and task to subordinate unit's subparagraph. Instead of keeping things simple using task and purpose, and stating that task and purpose only once in the order, many units deem redundancy and the use of a very detailed, wordy concept as the only way to fully communicate "how" the battle will be fought. The more words and detailed guidance the better, so goes the prevailing thought. Of course, this trend toward length increases the possibility of error, especially in a time-constrained environment mixed with the ever-increasing duress and fatigue of a rotation. Units that try to circumvent the standard OPORD format by using a matrix order are many times terse in their lan-

guage. The flow and narrative of what we want accomplished and why are lost in the various boxes of that matrix.

In other cases, the purpose and the key tasks contained in the commander's intent are in conflict with other parts of the OPORD such as the mission statement and the concept paragraph. In some instances, the developed concept of operations really does not achieve the commander's desired endstate expressed in the commander's intent. Many times, the order is strictly task-oriented, with no thought given or expressed as to the "why" of the operation or "why" we are giving our subordinate units their respective tasks, let alone any nesting of these purposes within the concept of operations. Subsequently, our wargaming process suffers because we start course-of-action analysis without a solid, well-articulated course of action on which to actually wargame. This bogs down the already difficult process of wargaming as we attempt to figure out what course of action we really developed to produce an integrated, combined-arms plan through this process. Frustration and fatigue then lead to an orders production process that produces the aforementioned type of battalion OPORD. If the maneuver plan is not well conceived or expressed, then we will never achieve a truly integrated plan with regards to using the available assets from across the other BOSs.

There is a tendency for commanders to focus on their commander's intent instead of ensuring that the commander's *intention*, their concept of operations, is fully developed and clearly expressed.[9] Commander's intent only goes so far in explaining "how" the unit will accomplish its mission in sufficient detail.[10] By keeping with the spirit of General DePuy's article and the doctrinal role of the commander's intent statement, only with a fully developed and clearly expressed concept of operations can a commander and staff give truly specific and concise guidance, fully using task and meaningful purpose, to subordinate units to accomplish the unit mission. The commander's intent is then critical to enhancing what the concept of operations states with this regard. More effort focused on the commander's intention, the concept, will reap great dividends for the commander and staff.

Based on this, less is better and we should always keep the audience in mind when writing an order. What is wrong with simply stating our subordinate units' task and purpose in a very simple narrative paragraph within the concept of operations that is enhanced by the commander's intent, and the other doctrinal parts of paragraph 3, to produce an effective and easily understood OPORD? Why, in the beginning of the 21st century, can we not live up to the guidance expressed below by three 1930 military establishments as they do address producing a clear and readable OPORD?

An order should contain everything a subordinate must know to carry out his assignment independently, and only that. Accordingly, an order must be brief and clear, definite and complete, tailored to the understanding of the recipient and, under certain circumstances, to his nature. The person issuing it should never neglect to put himself in the shoes of the recipient.[11]

— German Army Regulation 300, *Command of Troops,* 1936, No. 73

The order may have seemed clear to the man who wrote it, but it was not clear to the man who had to execute it, and that is the all-important thing… If seasoned professionals can misinterpret their own specialized vocabulary, it is certain that non-professionals will fare even worse. In peace, then, special emphasis should be laid on the language employed in orders. Leaders of all grades should be trained to test every word, every phrase, every sentence, for ambiguity and obscurity. If, by even the wildest stretch of the imagination, a phrase can be tortured out of its true meaning, the chance is always present that it will be. Short, simple sentences of simple, commonplace words, will go far toward making an order unmistakable.[12]

— U.S. Army Infantry School, *Infantry in Battle,* 1939

When issuing orders, the formation commander must pay special attention to the clear and concise formulation of the broad missions of formations and units, and to bringing out the underlying idea of the plan he decided on…The art of drawing up orders calls for skill in putting the concept of the operation vividly and lucidly in a few words.[13]

— Red Army's New Field Service Regulations, 1936

One can imagine an officer of the 1930s, who is versed in the doctrine of his day and reincarnated in the present, could conduct an extremely effective after-action review (AAR) on today's training battlefield as it concerns the production of battalion OPORDs. Using only the three above quotes as the standard, our OPORDs would provide an extremely effective teaching and AAR example for use by this officer. Obviously, we can do better.[14]

If this is the case, how can we expect to meet the goals of the concepts mentioned at the beginning of this article? My solution to this issue contains a structured thought process to produce a solid course of action and course-of-action statement. This process guides the mental and intellectual capital of the commander and staff that is critical in allowing the COA and COA statement to become the foundation of a solid decisionmaking process.[15] Units can certainly adapt this process to a time-constrained environment in producing a FRAGO, and it also supports the tenet of agility as well because it is a *mental* model that can be used with the digitized tools provided by the Army's battle command systems. That is what tactical problem-solving is all about.

The prerequisites established for COA development, outlined below, give needed focus to both the mission analysis (MA) process, as well as the guidance given by the commander to the staff following the MA brief. The commander and staff then know full well what answers they must produce as part of the MA process to meet the prerequisites of COA development. On the other end, a fully developed combined arms COA and statement provide needed focus for course-of-action analysis and will make the wargaming process smoother for the entire staff. No more COA development during wargaming need occur. The staff can focus on *how to* integrate available assets into the plan and synchronize the activities of those assets for the fight. Wargaming is reestablished as a specific "how to" integration drill rather than as a base plan development mechanism. In addition, this process will bring some intellectual and procedural discipline to many units' practice of just taking the commander's guidance of a directed COA and going right into wargaming without first producing a formal COA and COA statement. After wargaming, the resulting outputs, along with the COA statement, are refined to produce the doctrinal pieces of the unit's OPORD for that particular mission.[16]

Hence, COA development becomes the central foundation on which to execute the decisionmaking process that results in a solution to the unit's tactical problem and expression of that solution in the unit's OPORD. The 11 steps of that COA development process are listed below:

STEP 0: Mission analysis conclusions that answer COA development prerequisites.

The commander and staff must answer the following prerequisites coming out of the mission analysis process and the commander's guidance to develop a course of action. This is not an

all-inclusive list. Units should adapt these prerequisites as necessary for FRAGOs and extremely short timelines:

- Understand time available.
- Estimate roughly the correlation of force ratios and comparative combat power between friendly and enemy forces. These numbers tell you nothing about friendly or enemy force capabilities. However, planning without regard to relative combat-power capabilities at specific places and times leads to flawed-planning assumptions. The numbers derived in this step are tools for planning the array of forces and drawing logical conclusions about estimated combat-power capabilities at the start point, decisive point, and endstate throughout the COA development process.
- Develop a modified combined obstacle overlay (MCOO) that describes the physical environment, such as effects of terrain, weather, and civilian considerations, in which we will operate.
- Enemy considerations: develop an enemy situation template (SITEMP) and course-of-action statement two levels down, using task and purpose and the nesting concept that reflect the most likely enemy course(s) of action; define enemy success and failure through the eyes of the enemy commander; define criteria that will cause the enemy commander to change his COA or execute a contingency plan; define times and places where the enemy commander can decide to change his COA or execute a contingency/counterattack plan; define times and places where the major enemy force is decisively committed, such as the inability to change their COA, even if the commander tries to; and define points where the enemy commander can mass combat power faster than we can.
- Friendly considerations: understand the current operation and estimated duration as it affects the next mission; understand the approved restated mission and the unit's unique contribution to the higher headquarters' task and purpose; understand the unit's limitations, and the mission's critical event times and locations; receive commander's guidance that at least identifies the decisive point within the area of operations and the mission's endstate; understand current and projected combat power two levels down; define the minimum space subordinate units require to occupy for critical events such as the frontage, depth, and size of sectors, zones, and battle positions; define the minimum combat power or resources needed to perform critical events to accomplish task and purpose; define the time and place of decisive commitment such as the point during execution where we lose the flexibility to change a COA; identify decision points and transition points such as where we can transition to a branch or sequel with capability required to execute; and identify reconnaissance priorities and time required for reconnaissance over the duration of the operation.
- Analysis of combat power conclusions — compare friendly and enemy strengths and weaknesses using the elements of combat power. List your conclusions regarding relative combat power strengths and weaknesses for the operation. Identify who possesses the advantage in each category, with particular emphasis on how these elements of combat power affect using the maneuverist approach:

  - *Maneuver*: explain why each side has positional or mobility advantages or disadvantages relating to other friendly forces, the enemy, and the terrain. The aim is to understand where either side can gain a positional advantage over the opponent to deliver fires or fire potential to accomplish their task and purpose.

  - *Firepower*: explain the advantages and disadvantages associated with direct and indirect fire capabilities. Consider weapons system range capabilities, day and night target acquisition capabilities, nonlethal capabilities, joint capabilities, and sustainment capabilities. The aim is to understand how either side can best use firepower to integrate with, and enhance the advantages of, maneuver to accomplish their task and purpose.

  - *Protection*: explain the advantages and disadvantages associated with each side's ability to prevent the enemy from disrupting preparation and execution of the operation with emphasis on force protection measures. Consider reconnaissance and security capabilities; passive and active protective measures within the physical operating environment; engineer, air defense artillery, chemical, and signal capabilities, and lines of communications security capabilities. Factor in considerations of safety, field discipline, and fratricide avoidance as necessary. The aim is to understand how either side can best preserve their combat power while degrading the opponent's combat power.

  - *Leadership*: explain any factors that may enhance or inhibit either side's ability to operate at its optimum level of proficiency. At the tactical level, consider both unit leadership and specific leader personalities. Consider how long a force has been in combat, the effect of casualties and replacements, the effect of unit reorganization or organizational changes, and communications capabilities. The aim is to understand how either side can best use its leadership capabilities while exploiting the leadership vulnerabilities of their opponent.

  - *Information*: explain any factors that may enhance or degrade either side's ability to conduct offensive or defensive information operations (IO). Consider how offensive IO by either side can seize and retain the initiative by creating effects which impact on the opponent's information, information systems (INFOSYS), and decisionmakers. For defensive IO, consider either side's ability or inability to protect and defend information and their information systems. Consider both offensive and defensive capabilities in terms of IO elements and related activities as necessary: military deception, psychological operations (PSYOP), electronic warfare (EW), operations security (OPSEC), physical destruction, computer network attack, counterdeception, counterpropaganda, counterintelligence, physical security, information assurance, public affairs, and civil-military affairs. The aim is to understand how either side can best exploit the use of information and information systems to degrade their opponent's ability and enhance their own ability to employ the other four elements of combat power to accomplish their task and purpose.

STEP 1: Generate conceptual possibilities and gather tools.

Based on the conclusions in STEP 0, you can begin to develop options for exploiting enemy weaknesses and capitalizing on your strengths to achieve your purpose. The conclusions also establish a relationship between enemy forces, friendly forces, and the physical environment relative to the decisive point. To develop a plan to impose friendly will on the opponent, you must visualize the point at which, relative to time, space, requirements, and realistic capabilities, our side will start winning and the enemy starts losing — the decisive point of the operation. You should now have a rough, mental course of action developed in accordance with the maneuverist approach on which to proceed:

- The COA developer can use a detailed sketch map, computer screen, or a physical map of the area of operations (AO), posted with high-level graphics, to begin his physical development of the COA. Ensure that the visual aspects and understanding of the MCOO are represented on any of these formats. He should

also include staff representatives of the available BOS assets, such as ADA, fire support, MI, engineer, chemical, IO, aviation, and signal, for them to understand the development of the scheme of maneuver, and participate in the process relative to their specific BOS and the commander's guidance.

- Post the commander's intent and restated mission nearby as a ready reference. Post the "nesting diagram" that shows our unit's relationship to the higher headquarters' mission as well as our "horizontal" task and purpose relationship with other units executing this operation.

- Array enemy forces at the decisive point using the most likely enemy COA SITEMP that portrays enemy forces two levels down. In addition, post the enemy COA statement as a ready reference.

STEP 2: Array main effort, then supporting effort forces, two levels down at the decisive point.[17]

Array friendly combat power two levels down at the decisive point using decision graphics on the first, working sketch. For example, at brigade-level, show maneuver companies; at battalion-level, show maneuver platoons. Array forces independent of the current task organization and current command and support relationships.

Allocate sufficient combat power required to accomplish all critical events at the decisive point. Combat power is based on the COA developer's use of battlefield calculus and tactical judgment drawn from the conclusions in Step 0. This first array should show an informal grouping of maneuver elements two levels down.

Use stickers, a pencil, or generic computer icons first. Do not commit "pen to paper" until satisfied with the array of friendly forces required to accomplish the mission. Stay focused on the planned operation and your unit's unique contribution to the higher headquarters' mission. Beyond taking a note regarding the requirements, do not get sidetracked by branches or sequels at this point.

STEP 3: Identify meaningful purposes for the main effort force and all supporting effort forces.

Develop a meaningful purpose for the main effort maneuver force that "vertically nests" with the higher headquarters' mission, and then develop meaningful purposes for the maneuver force supporting efforts that "horizontally nest" directly or indirectly with supporting the mission accomplishment of our main effort force. Use bullet phrases at this point. If you initially plan on having a reserve force, identify purposes for commitment of that reserve in descending order of priority.

Using input from the BOS representatives, develop meaningful purposes for the supporting efforts of combat support assets that horizontally nest directly or indirectly with supporting the mission accomplishment of our main effort force. Again, use bullet phrases, for example:

- Protect the left flank of Armor Company No. 1.

- Prevent enemy from disrupting 2d Brigade's defensive preparations.

- Enable TF 1-25 AR to seize OBJ BLUE.

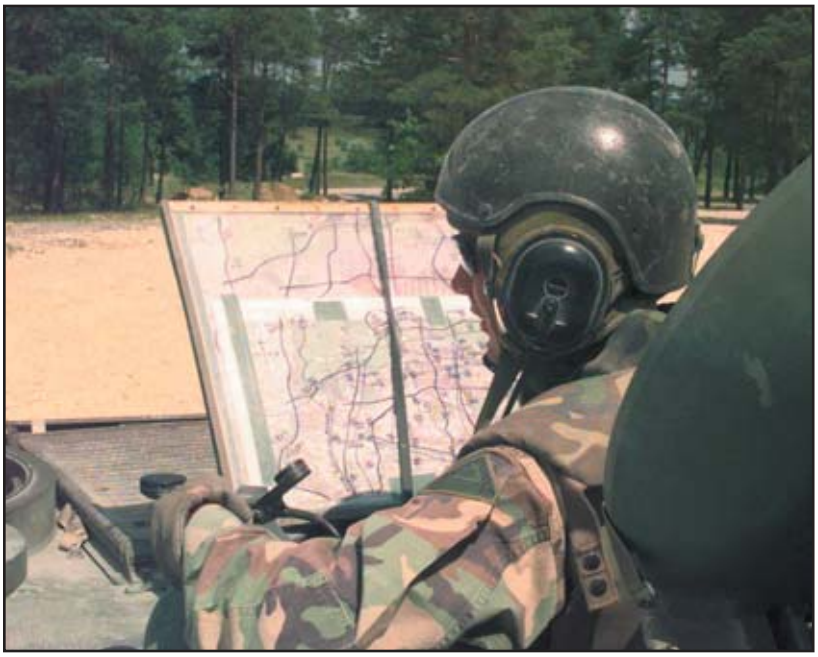
- Allow mech team No. 1 to mass fires against enemy in OBJ RED.

- Cause enemy to commit AGMB to the north of OBJ GREEN.

- Deny enemy from massing direct fires against TF 1-5 IN's attack along AXIS GOLD.

STEP 4: Determine tactical tasks that will accomplish the stated purpose for the main effort force and supporting effort forces.

Determine the tactical task that provides the estimated minimum effects needed to achieve the purpose of the main effort force, maneuver force supporting efforts, reserve force, and other BOS asset supporting efforts, respectively. Tactical tasks and definitions are explained in Appendix B of FM 3-90, *Tactics.*[18]



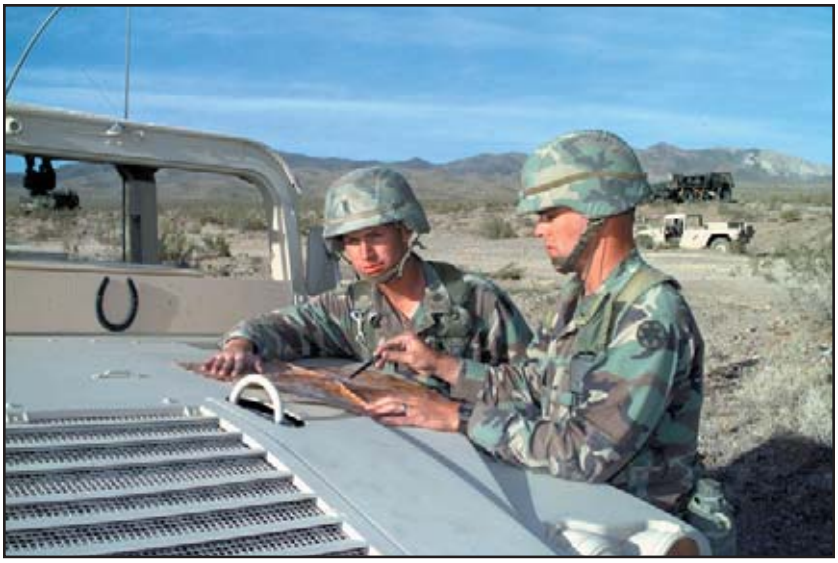
"To develop a plan to impose friendly will on the opponent, you must visualize the point at which, relative to time, space, requirements, and realistic capabilities, our side will start winning and the enemy starts losing — the decisive point of the operation. You should now have a rough, mental course of action developed in accordance with the maneuverist approach on which to proceed."

STEP 5: Task-organize forces and then assign command and control headquarters to unit groupings.

Formalize the task organization of combat power two levels down, and then assign headquarters to each of these groupings. Based on time available and your commander's preferences, you can assign specific units to these groupings or you can assign generic headquarters. You can assign specific units during wargaming after further analysis of what unit would best suit the specifics of the mission (B/1-26 Armor versus Armor Company No. 2).

STEP 6: Reevaluate vertical and horizontal nesting of subordinate unit and combat support assets' task and purpose.

Take a step back and evaluate your rough course of action at this time to determine if the task and purpose you have assigned to the main effort "vertically" supports mission accomplishment of your unit and higher headquarters. Also, determine if you are supporting efforts' task and purpose directly or indirectly, "horizontally" supports mission accomplishment of the main effort force. Make adjustments as necessary. Include all BOS representatives in this reevaluation process to ensure these



"One of the great benefits of being an observer/controller at the National Training Center (NTC) is the ability to sample and assess the smorgasbord of techniques and procedures used by our battalion-sized units in conducting operations over a 15-day campaign and training rotation. U.S. Army doctrine, although prescriptive, gives commanders a fair amount of latitude in developing various methods to accomplish their assigned task and purpose. Doctrine, as expressed in our respective field manuals and mission training plans, lays the foundation on which battalions develop varying internal techniques and procedures."

assets are used effectively to allow either the main effort or supporting efforts to accomplish their task and purpose, respectively. Include the XO to get a different perspective on the details of the COA. Does your draft COA achieve the commander's desired endstate?

Conduct a risk analysis. Where requirements exceed available combat power, conduct this risk analysis and reassess the COA for feasibility, suitability, and acceptability. Risk analysis includes analyzing the risks to the force and determine measures required to protect the force. There are two types of risk inherent to any COA: the COA incurs unacceptable friendly casualties, thus rendering the unit incapable to continue the fight; and the enemy does something unexpected that our COA cannot handle. All combat incurs both risks. The objective is to minimize them to acceptable levels. Develop an understanding of the risks by comparing potential enemy threats, combat power availability or combat multipliers to mitigate the threats, and whether or not mission success outweighs the risk. Never accept unnecessary risk. Do not accept risk just because something is in the "too hard" box. This reflects indiscipline and can be quickly associated with tactical incompetence. To identify risk to the unit and the mission define the enemy action, identify friendly combat power shortfall, identify available combat multipliers to mitigate risk, and determine if risk acceptable or unacceptable.

If you determine more than one decisive point, or have more than one essential task and purpose for the main and supporting effort forces, you will probably realize that the COA may fail tests of feasibility or suitability because of incorrect analysis of the unique contribution of your unit to higher headquarters' success, incorrect analysis of time and space requirements, incorrect analysis of subunit capabilities to meet critical requirements, and the COA addressed a branch or sequel rather than the current operation.

The course of action will be too complicated to articulate in an OPORD or a FRAGO, and cannot be coordinated clearly, concisely, simply, and timely. Once necessary adjustments are made, proceed to Step 7.

STEP 7: Develop the full scheme of maneuver.

From the decisive point, develop the scheme of maneuver by working your way backward to the start point and forward to the endstate. Address, in enough detail to cover necessary unit activities and tactical movement, how your unit reaches the decisive point of the operation, wins the fight at the decisive point (which you already have accomplished above), and then achieves the desired endstate. If the operation is phased, develop these phases as they support the unit reaching the decisive point in the fight. Use the components of the battlefield organization to guide this step as necessary. Brevity and simplicity in explaining the scheme of maneuver are paramount.

STEP 8: Develop and assign necessary graphic control measures.

Develop the minimum control measures required to clearly convey scheme of maneuver, responsibility for terrain, initial direct and indirect fire planning, and any other coordination activities to ensure that subordinate units can accomplish their assigned task and purpose.

STEP 9: Prepare the course-of-action statement.

The COA statement must be a clear and concise expression of the unit's solution to its current tactical problem. The statement must be easy to read and understood by a subordinate in a single rapid reading. Take the bullet comments and phrases from your work in the previous steps, and then write proper English sentences and paragraphs that clearly convey the flow of the operation. Use the following outline to construct the COA statement in paragraph form:

- Restated mission — who, what, where, when, and why.
- State the general type of offensive, defensive, or tactical enabling operation for the force as a whole, and responsibility for critical doctrinal missions associated with the respective type of operation. If conducting stability operations or support operations, address the specific type and any known specifics of the operation.[19]
- Using battlefield organization categories — shaping, sustaining, and decisive operations or deep, close, and rear areas — describe how the integration of subordinate maneuver units and BOS supporting assets will achieve the decisive point and execute the scheme of maneuver.
- Articulate how we successfully accomplish our mission in relationship to the decisive point. Include all elements, such as task and purpose for the main effort, task and purpose for maneuver supporting efforts, task and purpose for BOS supporting assets, task and purpose for reconnaissance and security forces, priorities of commitment (tasks and purposes in descending order of priority) for the reserve force, and task and purpose for the tactical combat force (TCF). If the operation is phased, clearly define, in terms of an event or conditions, when each phase starts.
- State acceptable risk and the justification for accepting it. Address and mitigate risk in wargaming, do not include these statements as you transfer the COA statement into the OPORD's concept of operations.
- Conclude with the commander's desired endstate from his intent.

STEP 10: Prepare the course-of-action sketch.

The final COA sketch must clearly convey the scheme of maneuver articulated in the statement using correct graphics in accordance with FM 101-5-1, *Operational Terms and Graphics.*[20] Use decision graphics to show combat power allocated to accomplish the task and purpose, and appropriate level of command responsibility. Using decision graphics will ease the COA analysis process by the staff as they adjudicate results from the wargame. Portray units in a manner that conveys relationship to the overall type of operation. Use dashed symbols to convey endstate. Draw solid and dashed boundaries to convey subordinate responsibility for terrain. Appropriately include the following on the sketch to provide a clearer picture of the scheme of maneuver, direct and indirect fire planning, and areas of responsibility: boundaries one level down to designate zones/sectors; additional phase lines; assembly areas; battle positions; axis of advance/direction of attack; engagement areas; objectives; forward edge of battle area, forward line of own troops, and/or line of departure/line of contact; major manmade and natural obstacles; direct fire and indirect fire support coordination measures; key terrain; identifying features, such as cities, rivers, and highways, to enhance orientation; and any other measure that enhances the effectiveness of the sketch in visualizing how your unit accomplishes its task and purpose and wins the fight.

In many ways, developing an effective, easily understood COA and COA statement is like developing and writing a narrative composition. The mission statement becomes your thesis, while the commander's desired endstate functions as the conclusion. From where does the composition's main body come? Of course, from the intellectual capital and hard work the COA developer exhibits during execution of Steps 0 through 8, which are the major points that serve to prove your thesis.

These steps function as a mechanism to develop a solid solution to the unit's current tactical problem, and the derived product serves as the basis for the main body of the narrative — the concept of operations. Major Marion Miles explains, "A unit's purpose must order the concept of the operation by connecting subordinates either directly or indirectly. All the functional systems within the organization must be connected by purpose to the maneuver function. On a chaotic battlefield, this is the only reliable way to achieve synchronization. Articulating a common purpose is the only consistent method to secure intelligent, adaptive initiative."[21] This process is a structured, mental methodology that allows you to solve the tactical problem using the maneuverist approach and clearly articulates that solution to your subordinates. I believe this process will assist our units and leaders in generating and disseminating the best possible tactical solutions to defeat any future adversary.

Notes

[1]General William E. DePuy, "Concept of Operations: The Heart of Command, The Tool of Doctrine," *Army*, August 1988, p. 40. This article plays a prominent role in the course methodology of A306, *Maneuver Brigade Warfighting for the S3/XO*, online at *https://cgsc2.leavenworth.army.mil/ctac/courses/a306/advbook.asp,* Lesson 4.

[2]U.S. Army Field Manual (FM) 101-5, *Staff Organization and Operations,* U.S. Government Printing Office (GPO), Washington, DC, 31 May 1997.

[3]Ibid., pp. H-3 and H-4.

[4]I believe Major James Larsen says it best in regards to *meaningful* purpose in his article, "Fighting with a Purpose," which is used in CGSC's A302 elective course on Corps Operations. "The purpose — the "why" — in the mission statement and the accompaniment of every task assigned in the concept of operations must be meaningful. The main effort's purpose must relate to the higher headquarters' purpose (vertically nested). The purpose assigned to each supporting effort must relate either directly or indirectly to that of the main effort (horizontal nesting). It is only through a clear and thorough understanding of the interrelationship of purpose that large, complex organizations can prosper in a chaotic environment, the talent of leaders can be exploited, and the conditions set for subordinate initiative. We must understand that the tasks that we derive during mission analysis may change during execution… Only a clear understanding of our purpose will usually prevail in the fight against a willing and able enemy… For soldiers and leaders to act boldly and decisively in a chaotic environment, they must also understand their unit's true purpose — their unit's unique contribution to the fight."; CPT Dave Thompson and CPT P. Kevin Dixon, "The Reason 'Why' We Will Win," *ARMOR*, July-August 1997; MAJ Luther Shealy, "Purpose-The Power Behind Initiative," *https://cgsc2.leavenworth.army.mil/ctac/courses/a306/advbook.asp,* Lesson 1; and MAJ Marion L. Miles, "Fighting Without Boundaries: Unleashing Initiative on the Tactical Battlefield," School of Advanced Military Studies, Fort Leavenworth, KS, pp. 11-26 and 41-46, for the relationship of purpose and subordinate leader initiative.

[5]LTC John F. Antal, "It's Not the Speed of the Computer That Counts! — The Case for Rapid Battlefield Decision-Making," *ARMOR,* May-June 1998. For more on the differences between analytical and recognitional decisionmaking, see Major John Schmitt, "How We Decide," *Marine Corps Gazette*, October 1995; and FM 6.0 (DRAG), *Command and Control*, GPO, Washington, DC. March 2001, paragraphs 2-47 to 2-53.

[6]W.J. Wood, *Leaders and Battles - The Art of Military Leadership*, Presidio Press, Novato, CA, 1984.

[7]Major General John Kiszely, "The British Army and Approaches to Warfare since 1945," in Brian Holden Reid's *Military Power-Land Warfare in Theory and Practice,* Frank Cass & Company, Ltd., London, 1997, pp. 180-181; FM 6-0 (DRAG), paragraphs 1-50 through 1-57; and FM 3-90, *Tactics,* Chapter 1, paragraphs 1-16 and 1-38 through 1-49.

[8]Kiszely, pp. 180-181.

[9]Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary defines "intent" as "that which is intended; purpose; having the mind fixed on some purpose," while "intention" is defined as "a plan of action; design; determination to act in a certain way." Please note the subtle distinction which parallels and guides the different purposes of commander's intent and the concept of the operation within a unit's OPORD.

[10]FM 101-5, *Staff Organization and Operations* p. 5-9, for an explanation of "what" commander's intent consists. Of note, it is *not* COA specific, which means its function is different from the concept of operations. See also FM 6-0 (DRAG), *Command and Control,* paragraph 1-57, 2-11, and 4-23 to 4-28.

[11]LTC John F. Antal, "The Wehrmacht Approach to Maneuver Warfare Command and Control," in Richard D. Hooker's, *Maneuver Warfare: An Anthology,* Presidio Press, Novato, CA, 1993, p. 349.

[12]"Infantry in Battle," *The Infantry Journal, Inc.,* 1939, pp. 161 and 158.

[13]Richard Simpkin, *Deep Battle: The Brainchild of Marshall Tukhachevskii,* Brassey's Defence Publishers, 1987, p. 205.

[14]Unfortunately, this is not a new problem. See William F. Crain, School for Advanced Military Studies monograph, "The Mission: The Dilemma of Specified Task and Implied Commander's Intent," U.S. Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, KS, 1989, p. 38.

[15]*Infantry in Battle,* p. 1, states, "each situation is unique and must be solved on its own merits. It follows, then, that the leader who would become a competent tactician must first close his mind to the alluring formulae that well-meaning people offer in the name of victory. To master his difficult art, he must learn to cut to the heart of a situation, recognize its decisive elements and base his course of action on these."

[16]Standard outputs from wargaming, but certainly not limited to these items, are as follows: a synchronization matrix; finalized task organization and command/support relationships for subordinate units; additional tasks and coordinating instructions for subordinate units; a finalized R&S plan; finalized direct and indirect fire plans for the unit; finalized graphic control measures; command and control, combat service support, and MOB/C-MOB/SURV considerations; finalized commander's critical information requirements that underscore and support the commander's decision points; production of a decision support template that identifies and integrates branches to the base plan; and any modifications to the base COA statement as it becomes the OPORD concept of operations.

[17]Based on how your mind functions best, you can execute Steps 2 through 5 either sequentially as laid out above, or you can execute these steps simultaneously to produce the desired effect.

[18]FM 3-90, *Tactics*, GPO, Washington, DC, 4 July 2001.

[19]For an explanation of applying the maneuverist approach to stability operations, see COL J.J.A. Wallace, "Manoeuvre Theory in Operations Other Than War," in Brian Holden Reid.

[20]FM 101-5-1, *Operational Terms and Graphics,* GPO, Washington, DC, 30 September 1997.

[21]Miles, p. 47.

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